



NEWS RELEASE

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL STATISTICS SERVICE
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Media Contact: Janet Allen (202) 690-8122
janet.allen@nass.usda.gov

Public Contact: Maria Bynum (202) 720-5192
maria.bynum@usda.gov

2002 CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE BEGINS TO COUNT THE NATION'S FARMS

WASHINGTON, Dec. 1, 2002 - Farm and ranch operators across America are about to participate in the Nation's largest, most detailed statistical portrait of U.S. agriculture – the 2002 Census of Agriculture. Conducted by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the census will provide a comprehensive portrait of agriculture at the county, state and national levels depicting how farms and ranches stand today compared with five years ago.

"Farmers and Ranchers will begin to receive the census of agriculture forms in late December to collect data for the 2002 calendar year," said Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman. "Input is critical for farm program development and implementation so it is important to return completed forms by Feb. 3, 2003."

Data provided by individual farmers and ranchers are held strictly confidential by law (Title 7, U.S. Code). Statistical results are aggregated and published only in geographical summaries to prevent identification of individual farms.

New questions will collect information on multiple operators per farm, production contracts, certified organic acreage, grain storage capacity, computer and Internet use, and new commodities such as bison, deer, elk, llamas, emus, and ostriches. Other questions will be similar to those asked in previous censuses and will focus on key information such as acreage and land use, operator characteristics, crop and livestock production, and agricultural product sales.

Twenty percent of operators will also be asked about production expenses, fertilizers and chemicals, machinery and equipment, market value of land and buildings, and farm labor. Report forms are tailored by region to make them less burdensome and more relevant to respondents in different parts of the country.

How do census of agriculture results help farmers and ranchers?

- S Farm organizations, Congress, and State and local governments** use the data to evaluate and propose policies and develop farm programs to protect and promote U.S. agriculture.
- S Farm machinery manufacturers, grain elevator operations, slaughter and cold storage operations, and other agribusinesses** more effectively target locations where they are most needed by using county and State statistics, resulting in economic benefit for farm operators.
- S Seed and fertilizer producers** compare yields and other information to help operators do the most effective job.

- S Irrigation specialists, water resource developers, and irrigation equipment manufacturers** convert census knowledge into practical advice for farm operators.
- S Farm broadcasters and agricultural editors** convey census results to their audiences and use the data to help focus their stories on important areas of agriculture.
- S Researchers and legislators** use county-level data to define problem areas and help farmers recover from outbreaks of disease and pests.

A farm, for census purposes, is any place from which \$1,000 or more of agricultural products were produced and sold or normally would have been sold during the census year. Because a key strength of the census is providing detailed facts about all farms, every response counts – whether from a large or very small operation. By responding completely and accurately, farmers and ranchers can make the 2002 Census of Agriculture an effective tool to help chart the future of their industry.

To find results from previous censuses and a wealth of current statistics on agriculture, visit www.usda.gov/nass/. Results from the 2002 Census of Agriculture will be released on Feb. 3, 2004.

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NOTE TO EDITORS: For background information and sample 2002 Census report forms, and for data from the last Census, visit www.nass.usda.gov/census/. Public service announcements, news releases, editorials and similar materials may be found by clicking on “Help Us Promote the 2002 Census” or by calling 1-800-727-9540 or by contacting your local State Statistical Office at www.usda.gov/nass/ under “State Information.”

Find agricultural statistics for your county, State, and the Nation at www.usda.gov/nass/.